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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SCUL](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: USG-DONATED SCHOOL KITS ELICIT SUPPORT AND ALSO  
SOME CRITICISM

1. (U) Summary: On October 21 and October 30, Ambassador and USAID Director joined Djiboutian officials and local UNICEF Director Thomas Davin, in the official unveiling and distribution of school kits provided by the Ministry of Education to primary school children in Djibouti under a USAID education grant of USD 1.6 million. In the October 30 event, which took place at Balbala Primary School in one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city of Djibouti, Prime Minister Dileita Mohamed Dileita praised the project and thanked the people of the U.S. for their support to education and economic development in Djibouti. In a surprising balanced article in the government-controlled newspaper La Nation, parents of children expressed both positive and negative views of the U.S. contribution. End summary.

2. (U) On October 21 and October 30, Ambassador and USAID Director joined Djiboutian officials and local UNICEF Director Thomas Davin, in the official unveiling and distribution of school kits provided by the Ministry of Education to primary school children in Djibouti under a USAID education grant of USD 1.6 million. The distribution is part of a nationwide program in Djibouti that will see 46,500 kits, containing exercise books, pencils, slate, eraser, pens, crayons, ruler and school bag, distributed to primary students in Djibouti's public school system. The distribution will also include 750 instructor and classroom kits containing blackboard pens and other items for use by Djibouti's primary school teachers.

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Government Support for Project  
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3. (U) During the October 30 ceremony, both Prime Minister Dileita and Minister of Education Absieh thanked the Ambassador, USAID Director and the people of the U.S. for their support to education and economic development in Djibouti. They expressed joy and satisfaction at the kits and extolled parents to send their children to school and extolled children to encourage their friends to come to school and remain in school. For her part, the Ambassador stated that access to basic education is a right of every child. She said she hoped the kits would help equip the students of Djibouti for their future this year, next year and for years to come.

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Encouraging Education for All Youth  
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4. (U) The kits, designed to reduce the heavy burden on parents to purchase school materials for their children, are part of a campaign to encourage more of Djibouti's children of school age, especially girls, to enroll in school and remain in school. School fees have already been eliminated by the Government of Djibouti as part of its reform program and to encourage parents to send children to school. School enrollment is currently at 53 percent overall in Djibouti, up from 39 percent in 1999 when education reforms began. Still, it is estimated that over 68,000 children of school age in Djibouti are not enrolling in local educational institutions.

5. (U) USAID's support program for education reform also includes improvement in access to education through rehabilitation of city and rural school infrastructure, provision of school equipment, improvement in learning through training and in service training of teachers, supervisors and school inspectors. It also includes development of a teachers' handbook, establishment of teacher resource centers in each of the five provincial districts, encouragement of community support and participation in school maintenance, increased girls' education and non-formal education activities.

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Not Without Detractors  
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16. (U) In a surprisingly balanced October 24 article carried in the government newspaper La Nation, several parents were polled about their views on the efficacy of the kits. Some expressed concern that the kits had arrived a bit late in the school year, and that most parents had already provided the essentials to their children. Nevertheless, they stated, this donation should be continued in the future. Others said the kits would permit them to save money in order to buy better clothes for their children or spend on other scholastic materials. For others, the money might have been better spent on other items. These included a first meal at school or, simply, daily milk, especially for students obliged to attend school on an empty stomach. Still, other parents asked why the initiative of school kits was extended only to public primary schools. They argued that private schools are not uniquely attended by rich students.

17. (U) There were other parents who expressed the view in the La Nation article that they were not convinced of the practicality of the kit project and who said that they did not think the kits would permit much savings. The costs, they said, were merely a "drop in the ocean" when compared with what was needed to educate a child. Others doubted that the Ministry of Education could sustain such a project for the long term and questioned whether this year's donation was merely part of an electoral campaign. (Comment: President Guelleh runs for re-election in May, 2005. End comment) The article concluded by stating that it is "access to education" which in the end will enable Djibouti's students "to fully integrate into the world of the new millennium and become responsible adults of tomorrow and future leaders of the country."

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A Plan for Distribution  
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18. (U) The Ministry of Education's distribution plan for the school kits entails dissemination in the five provinces of the country between October 30 and November 3. United States Military Civilian Affairs at Camp Lemonier and the Djiboutian National Army will jointly provide logistical support to regional governors (Commissars), school inspectors, and the community in this effort.  
RAGSDALE